



ANDERSON'S STERILITY.

Illustrated by the artist of the

Illustrated by the artist of the

ANOÛS STOLIDUS.

Noddy Tern.

Sterna stolidus, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 805.—Linn. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 227.—Gmel. Edit., vol. i. p. 605.—Bonn. et Vieill. Ency. Méth. Orn., part i. p. 91. pl. 25. fig. 2.—Bonap. Syn. Birds of United States, p. 356.

Passer stultus, Ray, 154.—Will. 297.

Gaira fusca, Briss. Orn., tom. vi. p. 199. tab. 18. fig. 2.

La Mouette brune, Buff. Pl. Enl., 997.

Noddy, Lath. Gen. Syn., vol. vi. p. 354.—Penn. Arct. Zool., vol. ii. No. 446.—Catesb. Car., vol. i. pl. 88.—Nutt.

Man., vol. ii. p. 285.—Aud. Birds of Am., vol. iii. pl. cclxxv.—Ib. Orn. Bio., vol. iii. p. 516.

Noddy Tern, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. x. p. 104.

Black Noddy (Anoüs niger), Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. p. 140. pl. 17.

Megalopterus stolidus, Boie.

Le Noddi noir, Cuv. Règn. Anim., tom. i. p. 522.

Anoüs stolidus, G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 2nd Edit., p. 100.—List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., part iii. p. 180.

IF the present bird be identical with the *Sterna stolidus* of the older writers, then the range of the species over the temperate and warmer parts of the ocean must be almost universal; but it will be seen that although the Noddies of the northern and southern hemispheres are very much alike, considerable variation is found to exist in their modes of nidification and the season at which that duty is performed; a difference is also found to exist in the number and colouring of their eggs, those inhabiting the northern hemisphere being said to lay three, and those inhabiting the southern only one. At the same time, rather than unnecessarily multiply the number of specific appellations, I prefer for the present at least to figure the Australian bird under the old name of *stolidus*.

I have much pleasure in transcribing Mr. Audubon's account of the breeding of the true *Anoüs stolidus*, as it is not only interesting in itself, but, when coupled with Mr. Gilbert's observations on the Australian bird, may tend to prove that in this, as in many other instances, birds inhabiting opposite sides of the equator and apparently identical, are really distinct, but having to perform similar offices in the great scheme of creation, are necessarily much alike, and form beautiful representatives of each other.

"The Noddies," says Mr. Audubon, "form regular nests of twigs and dry grass, which they place on the bushes or low trees, but never on the ground. On visiting their island on the 11th of May 1832, I was surprised to see that many of them were repairing and augmenting nests that had remained throughout the winter, while others were employed in constructing new ones, and some were already sitting on their eggs. In a great many instances the repaired nests formed masses nearly two feet in height, and yet all of them had only a slight hollow for the eggs, broken shells of which were found among the entire ones, as if they had been purposely placed there. The birds did not discontinue their labours, although there were nine or ten of us walking among the bushes; and when we had gone a few yards into the thicket, thousands of them flew quite low over us, some at times coming so close as to enable us to catch a few of them with the hand. On one side might be seen a Noddy carrying a stick in its bill, or picking up something to add to its nest; on the other several were seen sitting on their eggs unconscious of danger, while their mates brought them food. The greater part rose on the wing as we advanced, but re-alighted as soon as we had passed. The bushes were rarely taller than ourselves, so that we could easily see the eggs in the nests The Noddy lays three eggs, which average two inches in length by an inch and three-eighths in breadth, and are of a reddish yellow colour, spotted and patched with dull red and faint purple. They afford excellent eating, and our sailors seldom failed to collect bucketsful of them daily during our stay at the Tortugas."

"The Noddy and an allied species" (*A. melanops*), says Mr. Gilbert, "are the most numerous of all the inhabitants of the Houtmann's Abrolhos, where they breed in prodigious numbers. The present species lays its eggs in November and December, on a nest constructed of sea-weed, about six inches in diameter and varying in height from four to eight inches, but without anything like regularity of form; the top is nearly flat, there being but a very slight hollow to prevent their single egg from rolling off. The nests are so completely plastered with the excrement of the bird, that at first sight they appear to be entirely formed of that material; they are either placed on the ground in a clear open space, or on the tops of the thick scrub, over those of the *Sterna fuliginosa*, the two species incubating together with the most perfect harmony, and the bushes presenting a mottled appearance from the great numbers of both species perched on the top: the male *S. fuliginosa* sitting quite close to the nest of the Noddy, while its mate is beneath performing the arduous duties of incubation. On walking among the nests I was surprised to observe the pertinacity with which the birds kept their post; in fact they would not remove from off the egg or the

young, but would suffer themselves to be trodden upon or taken off with the hand ; and so thickly were the nests placed, that it was no easy matter to avoid crushing either eggs or birds at every step. By the middle of January the eggs were nearly ready to hatch, and there would be an overwhelming increase of this species yearly but for the check which nature has provided against it in the presence of a small lizard which is very abundant about their breeding-places, and which finds an easy prey in the young Noddy and the *Sterna fuliginosa*. I am satisfied, that on an average, not more than one out of every twenty birds hatched ever reach maturity, or live long enough to take wing ; besides which, great numbers of the old birds are constantly killed : these lizards do not eat the whole bird, but merely extract the brain and vertebral marrow ; the remainder is however soon cleared off by the *Dermestes lardarius*, an insect which occurs in amazing numbers, and gave me a great deal of uneasiness and constant trouble to preserve my collection from their repeated attacks. I did not observe the Noddy on any but the South Island. As it finds an abundant supply of food, consisting of small fish, small mollusca, medusæ, cuttle-fish, &c., immediately outside the outer reef, it has no occasion to go far out to sea ; I never observed it feeding in the smooth quiet water between the outer reef and the islands."

Considerable variation is found to exist in the markings of the eggs ; the greater number are of a cream-colour, thinly sprinkled all over, except at the larger end, where they become more numerous and form an irregular zone, with blotches of chestnut-red and dark brown, the latter colour appearing as if beneath the surface of the shell ; but examples occur in which the markings are much more numerous and almost equally distributed over the surface, and others which are nearly pure white ; and I possess one specimen in which the markings are so large and dark that it might be readily mistaken for the egg of some other bird. They are two inches in length by one inch and a half in breadth.

The flight of this species is apparently laboured, being performed with a considerable action of the wings ; at the same time the bird is capable of sustaining itself for a long time just above the surface of the water, and of frequently making abrupt and rapid turns while engaged in the search of its prey ; its soft and dense plumage renders it exceedingly buoyant, and as the largely-developed membrane of the feet would indicate, it swims with great ease.

The sexes are so nearly alike, that by dissection alone can they be distinguished ; and the young acquire the plumage of the adult at a very early age.

Upper and under surface chocolate-brown ; crown of the head pale grey, gradually blending with the brown of the upper surface ; primaries and tail brownish black ; immediately before and above the anterior angle of the eye a spot of black ; irides brown ; bill black ; feet dull brownish red ; webs dusky ; claws black.

The Plate represents a male, a female, a nest and an egg of the natural size.